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## MODI TO MEET TRUMP NEXT WEEK DURING TWO-DAY U.S. VISIT: MEA

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi will reach the US on February 12 for a two-day working visit, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Friday**

### TRIP COMES AS INDIA FACES DON'S TARIFF THREAT

Foreign secretary Vikram Misri said the visit will give further direction and momentum to the India-US relationship. "There is a clear convergence of interests between the two in several areas," he said. It also comes as India faces Donald Trump's tariff heat. The Republican has launched a global trade war by raising tariffs on goods from China, Canada, and Mexico | **P11**

### PRIME MINISTER TO VISIT FRANCE ON MONDAY

- "The fact that the Prime Minister has been invited to visit the US within barely three weeks of the new administration taking office shows the importance of the India-US partnership," Misri said
- Prior to his US visit, Modi will be in France from February 10-12 to co-chair the AI Action Summit with President Emmanuel Macron

**Sept 21**
WHEN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI LAST VISITED THE U.S.

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

## FIGURED OUT

**GROWTH**
RBI forecasts FY26 growth at **6.7%** on better Rabi harvest, tax relief

**INFLATION**
Inflation rate pegged at **4.2%** in FY26

**CHEAPER LOANS**
Home, auto, small business loans to see a drop in interest rates

**CYBER SECURITY**
Banks to have **'bank.in'** and non-bank financial entities **'fin.in'** domain names to check cyber security threats

# RBI tango with FM gives 1st rate relief in five yrs

Interest rate cut by 25 bps; guv says RBI will support growth while keeping inflation down

BENN KOCHUVEEDAN @ Mumbai

SEEKING to build on the feel-good factor generated by the Budget, which announced significant tax cuts, the Reserve Bank of India on Friday cut interest rates by 25 basis points to 6.25%. This is the first repo rate cut in five years and, together with the income tax relief, could give a big boost to consumption-driven growth.

The immediate impact of the rate cut is that it will make home, auto, and small business loans cheaper; loans on floating interest rates will automatically come down by 25 bps.

The latest cut brings curtains on the second longest high interest rate regime since the rate revision on October 22, 2008 ended a 5.1-year wait for the repo to fall from 8% after the global financial crisis that began in September 2007.

Friday's rate correction comes after five years, as the last cut was in May 2020 when RBI cut rates by an unconventional 50 bps to 4% during the peak of the pandemic.

While industry as well as the markets were not impressed by the nominal 0.25% repo rate cut as they expected more, what is striking in the policy announcement this time is the tone of new governor Sanjay Malhotra's statement; it says the monetary policy should be more accommodative to growth concerns than inflation. This signals a shift in approach by the central bank as taming inflation is the legal mandate of the monetary authority.

RBI expects economic activity to improve with agricultural output remaining upbeat, while manufacturing is set to recover in the second half of 2025. Accordingly, Malhotra said the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is confident of the economy growing at 6.7% next fiscal compared to 6.4% in FY25.

On inflation, the MPC sees prices moderating and finally aligning to the lower end of the target through the year. It sees inflation closing this fiscal at 4.8% and 4.2% in FY26.

On the tax cuts in the Budget, Malhotra said household consumption would improve on the back of better employment conditions. **P15**

FOUR-MEMBER SPECIAL INVESTIGATION TEAM FORMED IN PUNJAB TO PROBE THE RACKET; FIR REGISTERED

# Cuffing avoidable, shared concerns with US: GOI

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

AMID widespread outrage over mistreatment of 104 deportees from the US, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Friday said India has registered concerns with the US authorities, adding handcuffing was avoidable.

"It is a valid issue to raise and we continue to emphasise to the US authorities that there should be no mistreatment. We will continue to take up any instances of mistreatment that come to our attention. Action needs to be taken across the system against the underlying ecosystem that thrives on promoting illegal immigration," the foreign secretary said.

Asked whether India, like Brazil and Colombia, had protested the use of handcuffs and chains on deportees, Misri said, "We have been in touch with the US and have registered our concern."

Responding to yet another question of whether there is any record of the government of the day (Congress-led UPA) protesting the use of restrains since 2012, the foreign secretary said there was none.

Misri stressed that while the deportation process itself was not new, the latest one was "somewhat different" from previous repatriations, as it was classified by the US as a "national security operation", while answering a question why a military aircraft was used.

"This deportation is different. In the US system, it was described as a national security operation. We will consider any alternatives," he said.

A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal immigrants landed in Amritsar on Wednesday, marking the first group of Indians deported under the Trump administration's crackdown. Misri dismissed the US classification that India was uncooperative. "Every country seeks assurance that those being deported are its citizens, as there are legal and security considerations at play."

### 487 MORE INDIANS FACE DEPORTATION

In a related development, the US has notified about 487 other individuals, believed to be Indian nationals, against whom removal orders have been issued. Of these, the nationality verification process is underway for 295. Identifying details have been supplied to India on 298 individuals, Misri said

# MOST OF DEPORTEES ENTERED U.S. IN JAN VIA AGENTS IN DUBAI

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

ALMOST all of the 104 Indians deported by the US entered it in January via Mexico, and while most of them were helped by travel agents based in Dubai, some went through agents in Delhi and the UK.

As per officials who questioned the deportees at the Amritsar airport, many of them got in touch with the agents in Dubai through their local partners in India. Most of them paid several lakhs of rupees to these agents and travelled for months through multiple countries before reaching the US.

Mandeep Singh, 29, from Punjab contacted a Dubai-based agent who had earlier helped him reach Spain. After paying ₹1 crore, he landed in Dubai. From there, he travelled to Armenia, and then to Serbia. From there, he reached Tijuana in Mexico. He then walked for over 100 km through jungle, and finally entered the US, only to be detained by the border police.

Robin Handa, 26, from Haryana paid an agent ₹43 lakh that his parents got by selling one acre of land. He started his journey on July 24 and, after travelling through multiple countries, reached the US on January 22. He was detained at the border and send to a camp.

In Punjab, the police have begun a crackdown on "fake travel agents". A four-member Special Investigation Team has been constituted to look into the issue. The police registered a case on Friday against a person on a complaint filed by one of the deportees, who alleged that he paid ₹60 lakh to migrate to the US through the legal route, but was cheated.

# Relief to CM: HC junks plea for CBI probe

### SNEHAMAYI KRISHNA TO APPROACH SC

Following the Karnataka High Court's refusal to transfer the MUDA case to CBI, complainant Snehamayi Krishna has decided to challenge the order in the Supreme Court. "My fight will not stop. I will continue my legal battle," he told the media

### NOT A CLEAN CHIT TO CM, SAYS VIJAYENDRA

Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra said that the HC order does not give a clean chit to the CM. "It is not a setback to BJP that held a padayatra from Bengaluru to Mysuru. Lokayukta and ED probes are underway... let us wait and watch," he said

YATHIRAJU @ Bengaluru

THE High Court of Karnataka on Friday dismissed a petition filed by Mysuru-based social activist Snehamayi Krishna seeking its direction for a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in allotment of 14 compensatory MUDA sites to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife BM Parvathy.

The material on record nowhere indicates that the investigation conducted by the Lokayukta police is partisan, lopsided or shoddy for the case to be referred to CBI for further investigation or re-investigation, said Justice M Nagaprasanna while delivering the verdict dismissing Krishna's petition.

Granting liberty to the Lokayukta police to place its probe report before the special court to try criminal cases against sitting and former MPs/MLAs, which passed an order to register an FIR, the high court said it is for the petitioner to avail all such remedies under the law.

The court said the investigation reports by the Inspector General of Police of Lokayukta and the Additional Director General of Police should be placed before the special court. In the considered view, the case needs no re-investigation, further investigation or denovo investigation by CBI, the court added. **MORE: P4**

CM Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar release the official logo of the 16th Bengaluru International Film Festival, in Bengaluru on Friday | EXPRESS

MUDA CASE

POCSO CASE

# HC grants anticipatory bail to BSY

YATHIRAJU @ Bengaluru

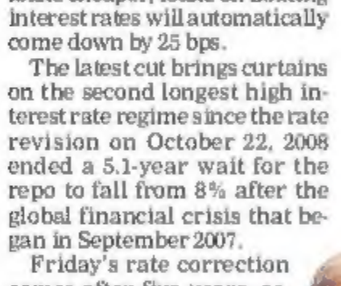
THE High Court of Karnataka on Friday quashed the trial court's order taking cognisance of offences against former CM and BJP leader **BS Yediyurappa** under the provisions of the POCSO Act, 2012, and IPC. However, the HC said the investigation of crime and the final report submitted by the CID will remain intact and sent the case back to the trial court to pass an appropriate order, keeping in mind the observations made in this order.

Noting that it has not answered any of the contentions of the counsel of the accused and CID, except on the order of taking cognisance, the HC granted anticipatory bail with a condition that he should furnish a bond for ₹5 lakh with two sureties for the like sum and should not leave the jurisdiction of the court without its permission. **CONTINUED ON P4**

## BJP OR AAP GOVT?

### DELHI ASSEMBLY POLL RESULTS TODAY

Counting of votes for the Delhi assembly polls will take place on Saturday to decide whether the AAP retains power for a third consecutive term or the BJP forms a government after more than 26 years



IN ONE VOICE

The 'Kodavame Balo' padayatra, which commenced from Kutta in South Kodagu on February 2, reached Madikeri on Friday. The rally saw thousands of people in traditional Kodava attire demanding Constitutional safeguards to protect their rights and unique culture and traditions | EXPRESS | **P7**

# GUV RETURNS DRAFT ORDINANCE TO REIN IN ERRANT LENDERS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

**GOVERNOR Thaawarchand Gehlot** on Friday returned the draft Karnataka Microfinance (Prevention of Coercive Actions) Ordinance 2025 to the state government. In his observation, the governor said the Ordinance may have a negative impact on the business prospects of the state. It may affect the self-help groups (SHGs), which play a big role in improving the economic status of the poor.

It may lead to violation of fundamental rights, he said and asked the state government to re-submit it along with clarifications.

"The budget session will commence next month. Instead of bringing in an Ordinance in a hurry, I advise the state government to hold a detailed discussion on it and bring in an effective law to protect the interests of the affected people," he said.

Meanwhile, Law Minister HK Patil said the government has not neglected the interests of lenders. He, however, said that the Ordinance will be introduced in the Assembly and Council. After considering the views of the legislators, a stringent law will be formulated.

In view of the increasing number of suicide cases involving borrowers and their alleged harassment by microfinance companies, the government decided to bring in a stringent law through an Ordinance. It sent the draft Ordinance to Raj Bhavan earlier this week.

The governor pointed out that the proposed Ordinance stated that no civil court shall entertain any proceedings against the borrower for recovery of his loan with interest. **CONTINUED ON P4**

### Ordinance not against one's basic right: HK Patil

Defending the Ordinance 2025 issued by the state government, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil on Friday said it does not curb one's basic right and it has not neglected the interest of lenders, nor restricted loan recovery. He, however, said that the ordinance will be presented in the Houses and opinion of legislators will be taken before a strong law is framed **P4**

EXPRESS READ

### K'taka to study sudden deaths post-Covid-19

Bengaluru: CM Siddaramaiah has ordered an expert panel to study if there is any link between sudden deaths of young people due to heart attacks, cardiac arrests, brain-related and neurological issues and Covid-19 and Covid vaccine. "There is a debate among people, that the deaths may be due to Covid or due to side-effects of the vaccine. Therefore, a study needs to be taken up," the CM said | **P3**

### Approval for new South Coast Railway zone

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet on Friday approved the establishment of a new zone of the Indian Railways — South Coast Railway. This will include a portion of the Waltair division, which will be renamed the Visakhapatnam division. The new railway zone has been created in accordance with the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act and is expected to improve efficiency in railway operations | **P11**

# Infosys lays off 400 recruits in Mysuru campus

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Bengaluru

INFOSYS is laying off close to 400 trainees in Mysuru. However, the Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate (NITES), which represents IT professionals, claims the number is close to 700.

These campus recruits were onboarded after a long wait in October 2024. Infosys said it has a rigorous hiring process where all freshers, after undergoing extensive foundational training at its Mysuru campus, are expected to clear internal assessments.

"All freshers get three attempts, failing which they will not be able to continue with the organisation, as is also mentioned in their contract. This process has been in existence for over two decades and ensures a high quality of talent availability for our clients," it added.

Though the company claims that these recruits did not clear internal assessments, Harpreet Singh Saluja, president, NITES, said these employees had endured a two-year-long wait for recruitment and Infosys summoned them to meeting rooms at its Mysore campus, where they were coerced into signing "mutual separation" letters under duress.

According to complaints received by NITES, the company deployed bouncers and security personnel to intimidate employees, ensuring that they cannot carry mobile phones and are left with no way to document the incident or seek help.

According to sources, many employees were asked to leave on Friday evening itself without any prior notice. NITES is planning to file a complaint with the Ministry of Labour & Employment, seeking its immediate intervention and strict action against the IT company.